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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR ONDCP DIRECTOR WALTERS, MAY 7-8, 2007

¶1. (SBU) We warmly welcome your visit to the Netherlands. You will be the first cabinet-level visitor since the new Dutch government took office. Your agenda will include meetings with three Ministers: Health Minister Ab Klink, Justice Minister Hirsch Ballin, and Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen. These meetings give you a chance to cover a wide range of counter-narcotics issues with the Dutch, and to advance our agenda on four important issues: (1) Establish a strong working relationship with the new Health Minister Ab Klink to continue the successful collaboration you began with his predecessor; (2) Advance cooperation on international drug trafficking with Justice Minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin; (3) Engage new Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen on poppy eradication efforts in Afghanistan; and (4) Engage in press outreach that explains our counter-narcotic efforts and strategies.

Overview

¶2. (SBU) Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende leads a broad coalition government comprised of his center-right Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), center-left Labor (PvdA), and Calvinist Christian Union (CU) parties. This is Balkenende's fourth government since coming to power in 2002; his party narrowly remained the largest party in Parliament following national elections in November 2006. Fringe parties on the right (Party of Freedom) and left (Socialist Party) did unexpectedly well in those elections, and Balkenende's coalition faces significant political pressure from both right and left.

¶3. (SBU) Our relations with the Dutch are excellent, aside from negative public opinion of U.S. involvement in Iraq and counter-terrorism policies. The Dutch are strong allies in the Global War on Terrorism, and currently have nearly 2,000 troops deployed in the heart of southern Afghanistan, where the Taliban are seeking to make a comeback. A Dutch contingent also served in the early stages of the Iraq war. Although they do not approve of our policies at Guantanamo, they are one of the few European countries engaging in serious dialogue on the issue with us. Commercial relations are strong, with heavy U.S. investment in the Netherlands and heavy Dutch investment in the United States. In your meetings and public remarks it would be valuable to emphasize the breadth of our cooperation and how much we value the Netherlands as a partner.

¶4. (SBU) Law enforcement cooperation is good and getting better. While Dutch and EU data protection (privacy) rules and bureaucratic restrictions continue to hamper some direct police-to-police cooperation and information sharing, we have made significant progress in the last two years to advance our law enforcement priorities with the Dutch. It would be useful to stress this point with Justice Minister Hirsch Ballin.

Counter Narcotics

¶5. (SBU) We have made significant strides in counter narcotics cooperation with the Dutch. On the health front, the agreement you developed with former Health Minister Hans Hoogervorst continues to result in cooperative research and exchanges on demand reduction and addiction treatment. On the legal front, DEA has successfully co-located special agents in two KLDP National Crime Squad (NR) units, dealing with cocaine and synthetic drug investigations. Co-location has greatly enhanced effective cooperation, in particular police-to-police intelligence sharing, and has helped to link Dutch drug investigations to major ongoing DEA international operations.

¶6. (SBU) There has been significant progress in the past five years on stemming the flood of ecstasy from the Netherlands to the United States. Through combined efforts by DEA and Dutch authorities, the number of ecstasy tablets seized in the United States that could be traced to the Netherlands dropped from over 5 million a year in the early 2000s to roughly 200,000 in 2004. Dutch efforts against ecstasy were commended by President Bush in the 2006 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR). Cooperation against synthetic drug trafficking will likely remain our top focus in the foreseeable future.

Your Meeting with Health Minister Abraham Klink  
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¶7. (U) Ab Klink succeeded Hans Hoogervorst as Health Minister on February 22, 2007. Your meeting with him will allow you to express appreciation for the drug demand reduction cooperation initiated in 2005, and to look forward to strengthening and continuing that cooperation. U.S. researchers and ONDCP representatives visited the Netherlands in January 2007 to discuss possible further areas of cooperation on demand reduction and drug addiction research.

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Your Meeting with Justice Minister Hirsch Ballin  
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¶8. (U) Ernst Hirsch Ballin took office September 21, following the resignation of Piet Hein Donner as Justice Minister over charges that he was negligent in not preventing a 2005 fire at a Schiphol Airport detention center that killed several illegal immigrants. Hirsch Ballin served previously as Justice Minister from 1989 to ¶1994. He is a distinguished law professor with a background in international law. As his background would suggest, Hirsch Ballin is a strong internationalist who supports enhanced cooperation on legal and law enforcement matters.

¶9. (SBU) Recent press and Parliamentary statements have alleged that DEA has conducted "illegal" counter-narcotic operations in the Netherlands. Hirsch Ballin wrote Attorney General Gonzales in January requesting clarification on the alleged unauthorized use of an informant in the investigation of Dutch ecstasy kingpin Henk Rommey, who was subsequently convicted in the U.S. on drug smuggling charges in 2005. In an unrelated case, an alleged ecstasy smuggler was recently acquitted by a Dutch judge because during the investigation, DEA had tape recorded a conversation with the defendant, allegedly without Justice Ministry authorization. The prosecutor is appealing the judge's decision. [Note: DEA maintains that they operated in accordance with an approved MLAT in both cases, but acknowledge that the conversation in question was recorded in error. End Note.]

¶10. (SBU) While these stories make the evening news, the truth is that DEA enjoys outstanding cooperation with their Dutch counterparts. Your meeting with Hirsch Ballin provides an opportunity to express appreciation for improved bilateral law enforcement cooperation, and to congratulate him for Dutch successes in combating the ecstasy trade. He may raise the allegations about DEA investigations; you should stress that DEA values its cooperation with Dutch police and operates in full coordination with Dutch requirements.

Your Meeting with Foreign Minister Verhagen  
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¶11. (SBU) Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen highly values cross-Atlantic ties. He will undoubtedly wish to share the Dutch perspective and sensitivities to conducting poppy eradication efforts in Afghanistan. The Dutch have set clearly defined guidelines that dictate when they are willing to support ISAF eradication operations. They insist that they are in Afghanistan to promote reconstruction and that small farmers need to be given an alternative to poppy in order to sustain themselves. A series of visitors, including State Department Ambassador Tom Schweich, continue to engage the Dutch on poppy eradication and we feel that substantial progress has been made. This topic is a sensitive one to the Dutch and treading carefully on this issue will help bolster our relationship.

Press

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¶12. (U) We have arranged for two print journalists to interview you upon the completion of your official program. Reporters from 'de Volkskrant' and AP will give you access to the Netherlands's most influential daily morning newspaper and to a broader international audience, respectively. This is a good opportunity to highlight bilateral cooperation to protect our citizens and the international community from the harmful effects of narcotics and to commend progress made thus far. The Dutch press is generally fair in its reporting and your visit should produce some great coverage that will help spread our messages to a broad audience.

Arnall